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COMMITTEES:
JUDICIARY
APPROPRIATIONS
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
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August 26, 1981

The Honorable Alexander M. Haig, Jr.
Secretary of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Al:

With this letter, I am enclosing a copy of my letter to President Reagan concerning AWACS.

My best,

Sincerely,

Arlen Specter

AS:kn

Enclosure

COMMITTEES:
JUDICIARY
APPROPRIATIONS
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

August 26, 1981

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I respectfully urge you not to proceed with the proposed sale of the enhancement package, including the Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft, to the Royal Saudi Air Force.

After considerable study, it is my view that this sale would be contrary to the best interests of U.S. foreign policy, and the proposed sale would subject your Administration to a significant risk of Congressional rejection.

I was among many in the Senate who supported your Economic Recovery Program even though we had significant reservations. I supported your program because I felt it was very important to back your leadership notwithstanding significant problems with the budget cuts for my state, Pennsylvania, and my stated preference for tax cuts on a year-to-year time basis to measure their effects on inflation and economic recovery.

On the issue of AWACS and the F-15 enhancement equipment, it is my view that many of your supporters, enough to make up a majority of the Congress, will not be able to support your position. I joined 53 other Senators in writing to you on June 24, 1981, urging that you not proceed with such a proposed sale to Saudi Arabia in the hope that this issue would not be brought to a vote.

While I join many others in the Senate and House in according great weight to your leadership, I strongly disagree with this proposed sale both on the merits and on my concern that a potential loss on this issue by your Administration would have significant, collateral, undesirable consequences. The prospect of a divisive Senate battle over the issue can only damage Congressional/Executive relations, Republican Party unity, and hopes for a strengthened U.S. presence in a secure and stable Middle East.

While I understand the need to contain Soviet expansionism and secure the Saudi oil fields, I fear that the proposed sale will create more long-run problems than may be resolved in the short term by acceding to this request. Rather than enhance Saudi Arabian security, the sale of such sophisticated equipment may well increase Saudi political instability and the risks of Saudi involvement in regional conflicts. It is clear that, once the AWACS planes are given over to Saudi Arabia, the United States would have little control over them, including their use against Israel, thus altering the military balance in that region.

While no one can predict Saudi Arabia's future political stability, sufficient doubts have legitimately been raised about that issue to fear the compromise of one of America's most sophisticated aircraft once it falls into Saudi hands, notwithstanding the most elaborate security precautions.

I am also deeply troubled by the long-range implications on the pledge made to the Congress in 1978 not to sell F-15 enhancement equipment to Saudi Arabia. If such pledges are subject to modification or cancellation on the contention of changing circumstances, how can the Congress ever agree to a proposal, conditioned on such a pledge?

Almost all the objectives outlined to justify the sale of AWACS could be met by leaving the planes in U.S. hands. The true test of the United States as a reliable ally is in our ability to be honest with our friends about their real military needs, not by agreeing to a request of questionable military necessity and uncertain political ramifications. When our Nation's reliability as an ally is tested in international relations, it is my view that we fall far short in subjecting Israel to the risks proposed by these powerful weapons in the context of repeated hostility by Saudi Arabia towards Israel.

I am taking liberty of sending copies of this letter to Secretary of State Haig, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Allen and Assistant to the President for Legislative Affairs Freidersdorf so that they will also know the depth of my feeling on this subject.

With best wishes,

Sincerely,

Arlen Specter

AS:kn

cc: ✓Secretary of State Alexander Haig
Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs Richard Allen
Assistant to the President for
Legislative Affairs Max Friedersdorf